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invented a way to manage themselves and their own lives. The position of the welder we met is clear: "The political parties, I don't like them. Because with parties, you raise a person up, and once they're at the top, 'the king is dead, long live the king'—it's always been like that. Because I have spent a long time in political parties, they don't interest me anymore. Because as soon as someone is at the top as a Member of Parliament or a mayor, once he goes up, that's it, you never hear from him again, and then the day he needs the people, he comes back, he whines. 'We're going to do this, we're going to do that…' and at the end there's nothing. These people are only interested in power and money."

Confronting the state and capitalism that are ravaging its territory and very existence, the people of Barbacha lead a continuous struggle for a dignified life. Through the practices of mutual aid and collective resistance, they invent an emancipated society on an everyday basis. Like others before them, notably in Chiapas, they do not attempt to take state power but to dissolve it, along with capitalism, via federated self-organization in communes. Like the Zapatistas, they know that solidarity is a weapon when coordinated struggles come together.

This is the welder's conclusion: "We have to fight where we are. If everybody fights together, in France, in Morocco, here… we can improve things." And as the elderly Da Taïeb tells us, "Alone, the residents of Barbacha won't be able to throw this out. So we are trying to create a great movement, a bulldozer, to destroy it."

Chronicling an Autonomous Uprising in North Africa

The autonomous region of Rojava has gained international visibility as a beacon of struggle against the Islamic State and other forms of autocratic power, an experiment in which many anarchists are currently participating. Yet Rojava is not the only region in which a struggle for self-determination has expanded to open a path towards total liberation. In north Africa, in the region of Kabylia, an ethnic minority oppressed by racism and state oppression has initiated in a series of revolts comparable to what the Kurds have accomplished in Rojava and the Zapatistas in Chiapas. Throughout decades of struggle, they have established zones of autonomy and built bridges to others in revolt, in hopes of bringing about "a genuine emancipatory social revolution." Read on to learn about this underreported struggle.

Demonstration in Kabylia, April 20, 2014, commemorating the Amazigh Springs of 1980 and 2001.

Translators' Introduction

By Michael Desnivic and Habiba Dhirem-Kasper.

This translation has allowed us to share a recent resistance movement that, until now, was completely unknown to English-speaking countries and still largely unknown outside of Algeria. The author, a French writer, filmmaker and documentarian, Matouf Tarlacrea, was very happy to see its release into English. In 2014, he traveled to a commune called Barbacha in northern Algeria with some friends for two days and collected personal stories and documents to present "Échos de la Commune libre de Barbacha" as both an article and short documentary video. Matouf's specialty is primarily in resistance movements around the world. His grandparents are from

northern Algeria and he currently lives in Toulouse, France and is active in supporting CREA (*Campagne de Réquisition, d'Entraide et d'Autogestion* or Requisition Campaign for Mutual Aid and Self-Management), a squatted communal building inhabited by people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds united under one common banner: **the total and complete rejection of all authority**.

Kabylia or Kabylie is a region in northern Algeria just east of the country's capital city Algiers, inhabited primarily by the indigenous Kabyle people. Outside of Belgium and France, Berbers and Kabyles are fairly unknown to Westerners: Algeria and all of North Africa are imagined to be exclusively populated by Arabs. The Kabyle people are an ethnic division of the Berbers, among many other Berber ethnic groups. Most Kabyles and other Berber ethnic groups currently speak Arabic, Algeria's official language, as well as regional Berber dialects; French, introduced via colonialism, is also common, especially in business and education.

Who are the Berbers? They are the original inhabitants of North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia) and parts of West Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger). But they did not *call themselves* Berbers: like the names of most indigenous peoples (e.g. "Indians"), this name was given to them by invaders. It comes from the Greek word *barbarous* and the Latin cognate *barbarus;* root of "barbarian," originally denoting a person with a primitive civilization. The original inhabitants of this region called themselves *Imazighen,* which roughly translates to "free people," known individually as *Amazigh* (masculine) and as *Tamazight* (feminine), who speak the *Tamazight*language. Their land was known as *Tamazgha,* renamed the "Maghreb" by the Arabs. In Antiquity, the people of this land had close relations with Ancient Greeks and Romans.

As with many ancient people, contact with outside cultures alternated between friendship and hostility, with the Berbers

the basic demands for the economic development of the commune were not carried out, a growing number of the residents are conscious of the fact that the Assembly should not just be reduced to a tool only for struggle, but that it could become a structure of political, economic, and permanent social self-organization.

By the end of the month of December 2013, the state still had not satisfied the demands that the OGA had presented in exchange for the return of the leader of the *Daïra.* Those in the camp that think that the People's Assembly should completely replace all forms of State power are again reassured. Da Taïeb, whom we meet in February 2014, sums up his strategy. "We have to completely destroy the Algerian system. It's not just about Bouteflika,[15] his ministers or his *walis*: the state must be completely destroyed. Only generals live well in Algeria, the people have nothing. Rich state, poor people! This is why the people revolt. To take back our rights. Because there is a way! This is *hoggra.*[16] Look! A Member of Parliament gets 35 million dinars per month or more, plus an international passport, while any other employee in the commune makes only 15,000 dinars! […] We are protestors and we wish for other marginalized people like us come to our aid, that we all unite, that we help one another."

He is interrupted by a friend, "What interests us is not the elections, but in assembling together […] to struggle against this system."

The reflection on the elections and the political parties has effectively evolved amongst the residents of Barbacha who have

[15] Abdelaziz Bouteflika, current President of Algeria, in power since 1999. —Trans.

[16] In the Algerian Arabic dialect, the word hoggra (also spelled hogra), often translated as "oppression," means having one's rights denied to them, being cheated, exploited, humiliated, or scammed by a ruler, authority figure, or government. The term was used frequently during the Arab Spring in Algeria. One conducting hoggra is known as a haggar. —Trans.

measure of goodwill. This is summarized in Communiqué No. 30:

> "If the logic of appeasement and advancement moves toward the final unblocking of this conflict, and the return of the meeting place (the Axxam n Caâb) to the Commune (nobody questions its character as a communal good) can help reinforce this dynamic, we are ready for this. However, the public powers must know that it's because of this meeting place that the movement has remained peaceful and refined in wise judgment. In any case, the General Secretary was allowed to use it whenever the necessity arose. By default, each one of us will assume responsibilities. […] We are neither terrorists nor are we cowards. We are the planners of adventures and are consciously organized with the single goal of allowing our commune to have its part in development and that our proud people have the means to assume their full duty to contribute to the veritable liberation of our dear country, Algeria, and so that it can contribute to the construction of a universal project that can liberate all of humanity."

A city hall, even if it's far-left and sincerely engaged with its residents, cannot do anything that can radically change the lives of people. It would remain a manager, a hierarchy, a link in the network of the powers of the state and capital. It may represent the people, but it is not the people. Mayor Saddek Akrour summarized the role attributed by the state to the PST while in office during the preceding mandate: "We suddenly found ourselves in a feedback loop of public finances between oil profits and private enterprises."[14] In this context, and since

[14] Interview in Paris, 2008.

playing the roles of both conquerors and conquered. Their contribution to the developing cultures of Antiquity and the Middle Ages has left a mark on African and even European culture (for example, historians suspect St. Augustine may have been an ethnic Berber). More recently, Situationist International cofounder Guy Debord noted in his 1955 article "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" that the term "psychogeography" was coined by "an illiterate Kabyle" he and his friends had known.

Algeria has a rich history of revolt against the various forms of oppression and tyranny that have menaced it, including French colonialism and theocratic autocracy. Algerian-born Albert Camus noted the immense racism the Kabyles experienced through socioeconomic exclusion, extreme poverty and famines instigated by the French settler-colonialists in his essay "Misère de la Kabylie." In *We Are Imazighen,* Fazia Ailel states, "Berbers were denounced as a creation of France" as a means to intensify discrimination from the dominant Arab ethnic group. Generation after generation has resisted this racism. The struggles against discrimination and colonialism led to struggles against other forms of oppression as well. As is to be expected, throughout history, revolutionary attempts in Algeria to overthrow dictatorial systems of colonization and, later, state bureaucracy have consistently been co-opted by various "liberators" attempting to secure power for themselves via political, economic, military, or religious leadership roles. This is as true on the African continent as it has been in Europe and Asia.

Kabyles in particular have a long, vast history in avoiding authority and hierarchy, rejecting French colonialism and bureaucracy, by implementing local village assemblies; government in itself has mostly been alien to them. In his 1902 book *Mutual Aid,* Peter Kropotkin noted the rejection of authority that seemed to be imbedded in Kabyle culture.

> "The Kabyles know no authority whatever besides that of the *djemmâa,* or folkmote of the village community. All men of age take part in it, in the open air, or in a special building provided with stone seats. and the decisions of the *djemmâa* are evidently taken at unanimity: that is, the discussions continue until all present agree to accept, or to submit to, some decision. There being no authority in a village community to impose a decision, this system has been practiced by mankind wherever there have been village communities, and it is practiced still wherever they continue to exist, i.e., by several hundred million men (sic) all over the world."

He adds:

> "Mutual support permeates the life of the Kabyles, and if one of them, during a journey abroad, meets with another Kabyle in need, he is bound to come to his aid, even at the risk of his own fortune and life; if this has not been done, the *djemmâa* of the man who has suffered from such neglect may lodge a complaint, and the *djemmâa* of the selfish man will at once make good the loss. We thus come across a custom which is familiar to the students of the mediaeval merchant guilds. Every stranger who enters a Kabyle village has right to housing in the winter, and his horses can always graze on the communal lands for twenty-four hours. But in case of need he can reckon upon an almost unlimited support. Thus, during the famine of 1867-68, the Kabyles received and fed every one who sought refuge in their villages, without distinction of origin. In the district of Dellys, no less than

installation of the mayor, a large popular meeting is organized on November 29, 2013. A thousand residents participated, voting by a show of hands against the shameful alliance. "Of the more than one thousand people responding to our call, only three hands were raised (one ironically) in approval of the installation of the infamous mayor of the RCD-FLN-FFS shameful alliance, Mohammed 'Mahmoud' Benmeddour, whom we had generously invited to speak. It was an authentic referendum worthy of a real people's direct democracy, unknown anywhere else," stated Communiqué No. 32 of December 6, 2013.

The struggle doesn't budge. However, the demands directed to the State and public powers for the shutting down of judiciary pursuits, the dissolution of the PCA, and the funds destined to develop the commune are all unsuccessful. More radical perspectives emerge among the population.

Da Elhamid.

And What if the People's Assembly Completely Replaced City Hall?

The battle for new elections and to establish a "legitimate" city hall comes with numerous concessions. It begins with the return of the gendarmerie, although it would be kept out of the commune and will avoid all conflict. Mabrouk says that the State justifies the reinstallation of the gendarmerie as a measure to protect the population against "terrorism." Additionally, Da Elhamid tells us that not very long ago, the gendarmes would have arrested us for having our discussion. "Nothing has changed, it's still the same system. Because even the gendarmes [might as well be] colonial gendarmes," he says.

The reinstallation of the gendarmerie is not the only concession. The residents that are in favor of having new elections plan also to give the House of the People back to the PCA as a

collectively improve their lives. In their Communiqué No. 26 of May 2013, the OGA states that it's convinced that the nomination of the General Secretary to manage the *Daïra* does not bring desired solutions for the population. The Assembly also denounces "all tentative desire to rehabilitate the mayor of the alliance and his team in order to put them in command of our glorious commune." Rightfully, on May 22, Mohamed Benmeddour, his team, and the members of the "alliance" tried once again to enter city hall. But they were again pushed out by the crowd. However, the Assembly decided in favor of a concession: the reopening of city hall. This is as much about managing "current affairs" as much as it is of "the critics."

During the summer, the *Wilayah* blocks all power of signature from the General Secretary—the only finances it leaves at his disposable are for "a closure," destined to protect the *Daïra* as well as the means to reinstall the gendarmerie. The General Assembly challenges the unwillingness of the *Wilayah,* stressing the fact that the population has accepted making concessions (notably, the reopening of city hall). In the "Appeal of September 21," the OGA thus denounces: the reduction of communal services to a strict minimum; the fact that communal workers were receiving their payments bit by bit, and, if they're lucky enough to receive them, months late; the refusal of the *Wilayah* to approve the budget of 2013 (which stifles the communal treasury); the shutdown of all construction sites, especially of the local high school; the end of the school bus service (the bus drivers have not been paid and neither have any of the suppliers for the school's cafeteria) and the "squatting of the local commune by the gendarmerie."

Finally, after a long wait, on October 1, the General Secretary is authorized by the Minister of Interior to divide the budget and pay the commune's employees. But during the entire fall of 2013, the "shameful alliance" tries many times to get back into city hall. Each time, the people of Barbacha, united and determined, prevent them. To present their discontent about the

> 12,000 people who came from all parts of Algeria, and even from Morocco, were fed in this way. While people died from starvation all over Algeria, there was not one single case of death due to this cause on Kabylian soil. The *djemmâas,* depriving themselves of necessaries, organized relief, without ever asking any aid from the Government, or uttering the slightest complaint; they considered it as a natural duty. And while among the European settlers all kind of police measures were taken to prevent thefts and disorder resulting from such an influx of strangers, nothing of the kind was required on the Kabyles' territory: the *djemmâas*needed neither aid nor protection from without."

Barbacha's residents march against repression, Béjaïa, April 9, 2013. The banner reads "Down with repression."

On July 5, 1962, Algeria was granted independence after nearly 8 years of war and 132 years (exactly to the day) of colonization. The brutal war, depending on the sources, left around 400,000 to 1.5 million dead. Confusion, fear, disillusionment and atrocity seem to be inevitable byproducts of war, and the end of the occupation (as with the end of so many) led to the rise of despotic leadership.

But after the colonial forces left, something unusual happened. Coming to power at the end of the War, the workers and peasants of the country decided to implement *autogestion* or self-management. Quickly, the working class took over much of the industry and the peasants much of the countryside. Thus the Algerian War of Independence suddenly became the Algerian Revolution.

[1] European supporters of and participants in the Algerian Revolution were referred to later as pieds-rouges.

Algeria's self-management revolution (1962-65) united the entire working class, Berber and Arab, as well as even ethnic French *pieds-noirs*[1] to build a socialist (some might even say "libertarian socialist") revolution that shook off the dead weight of political parties, including the Leninism and Stalinism that numerous bureaucrats were struggling to implement in Algeria and throughout most of the freshly decolonized countries. The struggle of the Algerian workers, peasants, and students was consistently hammered and wedged between various ideologies: religious conservatism, Leninism (or "vanguardism"), capitalism, nationalism, ethnic identity. Unsatisfied by each of these, an Algerian proletariat—people who had not read Marx and Engels, brought a communist party to power, or possessed any interest in centralizing power and the means of production in the hands of the State—had successfully done what socialists in the Cold War era were bent on preventing working people from doing: taking power *for themselves.*

"After independence, the Algerians turned to socialism, which to them meant self-management." (Autogestion ouvrière et pouvoir politique en Algérie (1962-1965), Monique Laks, 1970.) Revolutionaries in Algeria were quickly superseding Marxism and its apologists. Ukraine, Germany, Russia, France, and especially Spain are historically seen as the bastions of anarchist and libertarian socialist insurrection by means of self-management, especially in the form of workers' councils. The revolutionary reorganization of society got underway in Algeria along similar lines, with far less influence from Western thinkers, pushing itself to challenge both state control and private ownership of capital.

With an uncertain socio-economic future in post-independence, the new rulers of Algeria appeared inept. After the war, the General Union of Algerian Workers (*Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens* or UGTA) issued the following appeal: "…our battle is soon going to take a new form… The resumption of economic activity will allow the workers

demand new elections. The OGA calls for a general strike in Barbacha and a gathering in front of Béjaïa's courthouse on April 9, the trial date of the 24 arrested. More than a thousand demonstrators rally in front of the court to protest and the general strike is massively undertaken.

Axxam n Caâb, House of the People, Barbacha, February 2014. The banner reads, "Long live the struggle for only struggle pays off."

All this pushes the population to further develop methods of self-organization. Communiqué No. 23 of April 11, 2013 states:

> "The path is still long and difficult. Therefore, the reinforcement of the self-organization of the population must be our permanent task: it is necessary to strengthen the current village committees and create new ones in villages and neighborhoods not yet organized. Because the relative return of the maintenance of the Daïra and City Hall constitutes an important step in our fight, the real development of our Commune must be our strategic objective. […] These are our true battles: the Buâmran mine, the mini-dams, town fuel resources, the high school, the CEM of Tibkirt, RN 75,[13] the Commune's and Wilayah's roads, telephone and internet services, machines, agriculture and forestry, youth and leisure, etc. A true synergy of the people at the bottom of society is more than indispensable to move forward and succeed with this project."

April 19 and 20, 2013, the Assembly is in charge of organizing the festivities commemorating the Berber Springs of 1981 and 2001. It is in this context that the idea emerges and gains momentum that a people's assembly is the best and most legitimate means to solve the problems of the inhabitants and

[13] RN: Route National. A highway. —Trans.

"current affairs of the commune," meaning mainly administrative records, the payment of municipal employees as well as the deliverance of birth and death certificates (which the population needs to proclaim its rights). In consequence, the representatives of the OGA decide to cancel the rally scheduled for February 17. But they plan a new "peaceful" march and encampment in front of the *Wilayah*'s headquarters on March 24.

That Sunday, March 24, marks a turning point. Faced with 2000 demonstrators blocking the headquarters of the *Wilayah* of Béjaïa, the *Wali*calls on riot police who intervene with extreme brutality, injuring many people—one young demonstrator even has both legs broken.

Twenty-four people are arrested, including Sadeq Akrour, the PST mayor, who is released—with bandages around his head from the beatings—after 24 hours from the pressure and acclamations of hundreds of people that came to wait for his release. On March 25, the OGA announces a new general strike in Barbacha to pick up the comrades that were arrested the day before in Béjaïa.

Emotions run high in Kabylia as they do in the entire country. Especially since during this time news has spread of the government's use of police force against the demonstrations of unemployed workers in the south. "This is how, while struggling for the unconditional liberation of our six comrades under judicial control, it is now more urgent than ever to find new methods of struggle in order to prevail with the success of the so-called principal demands," states Communiqué No. 20 of March 26.

The mobilization does not weaken. On Sunday, March 31, hundreds of Barbacha's residents demonstrate again in front of the court of Béjaïa where six of their own are scheduled to appear for a hearing. They demand all legal proceedings be suspended. They also announce national actions for upcoming days to impose the dissolution of the municipal council and to

to take the initiative to be present everywhere, to participate, to direct and control the economy of our country." The UGTA continued an appeal to the newly-formed government and the French former owners of the farms and factories to reopen them. The UGTA stated that if there is "a negative answer, the government must organize a system of management by the workers." The request fell on deaf ears at first, but workers' self-management continued to come into discussion and was granted official status by Ahmed Ben Bella, the first President of Algeria, in September 28, 1962 in his inaugural speech (plausibly, however, to outstrip his bourgeois competitors with his bureaucracy). After Ben Bella was overthrown by Boumédienne in a *coup d'état*, self-management and the workers' movement were targeted by the new regime that blended Islamic fundamentalism and technocratic state-planning, destroying self-management in a few years' time.

Barbacha, February 2014.

The movements of the "Arab Spring" were particularly intense in Algeria; but they were preceded by several Berber Springs. In 1980, a lecture on Kabyle poetry by Moulod Mammeri was banned at the University of Tizi-Ouzo. This sparked the first spontaneous Berber Spring, a series of riots and strikes aimed at demanding status for Tamazight as a national or official language, and culminating in other attempts to change Algerian society. Another Berber Spring broke out in 1988. A civil war erupted in 1991 and lasted until 2002.

On April 18, 2001, an event occurred that again put Algeria and the Kaybles in the international spotlight. Guermah Massinissa, an eighteen-year-old high school student arrested in Tizi-Ouzou, a city in Kabylia, was shot by police while in custody under very mysterious circumstances. Rioting broke out almost immediately, causing what was dubbed the "Black Spring." As often occurs in uprisings against State-sponsored murder, the entirety of the society and everything it produced

was called into question. A movement emerged for an autonomous Kabylia.

This revolt elucidated what the insurrectionaries were ultimately attempting to do and what they wanted to communicate to Algeria and the rest of the world: they refused to be led or dominated by anyone, French, Arab, *or* Kabyle.

Men, women, and children all over Kabylia participated in this third Berber Spring. The common slogan chanted was "You can't kill us, we are already dead!" (Somewhat more intimidating than "We are the 99 percent.") Kabyle women were particularly active in the revolt, voicing their disgust against the possible State-sponsored murder of their brothers, husbands, boyfriends, fathers, and sons.

Government offices, courts, police stations—all repressive infrastructures of the State—were put to the torch. Showing a thoroughgoing critique of all the different things that restricted their liberation, the rioters went after the buildings of political parties and Islamic fundamentalists. The Islamists, whose ideological terror paralleled the State's autocracy culminating in the deaths of countless Algerians, saw their meeting places turned to ash. By the end of the month, the entire region of Kabylia was in total revolt. Every attempt at negotiation with the Algerian government was rejected by the communities of resistance. Police and Islamic fundamentalists were consistently driven out of villages and cities. Labor unions and left-wing parties were shunned as all attempts to take authority were considered traitorous, including voting in the elections.

The people of the region recreated the *aarch* (similar to Kropotkin's aforementioned system of the *djemmâa*), a method of coordinating the needs of the community with revocable delegates from the village assemblies (see Wolfi Landstreicher's *Autonomous Self-Organization and Anarchist Intervention*). Via *aarchs,* the community runs decisions by consensus and assembly. By rejecting hierarchy, it purges the old Algeria—and the

The general strike of January 31, 2013 is a success. During the popular meeting at the end of the day, much of the population decides to organize a march and then a sit-in in front of the *Wilayah* of Béjaïa on February 3. The OGA adds "a more radical action, namely the blocking of street traffic access to both entrances of Béjaïa." Both of these actions are massively implemented, but they don't suffice for the Prefecture to give in. In Communiqué No. 9 of February 4, 2013, the Assembly speaks of the risk of a "fratricidal bloodbath among Barbacha residents" if the demands of the population are not met. Faced with the "masquerades" of a power that's attempting to criminalize them, they become from then on an organ of people's self-management.

> "Our movement is jealous of its own independence. It is above all parties and all partisan logic. We pronounce our decisions in total democracy (direct, we should say) in an Open General Assembly that we have adopted as a popular commitment to our conscious organization. […] We forbid you to judge our method of struggle. We have already declared that we have passed the stage of rioting. Our movement is highly peaceful and of an exemplary maturity."

On February 11, the minority opponents of the OGA try again to enter the PCA to reinstall the "Mafioso" mayor, but they are stopped by the local population blocking access to city hall. In response, the Assembly calls for a new gathering in front of the *Wilayah* on February 17. The *Wilayah*'s administrator agrees to meet with the representatives of the OGA and the PST. During this meeting, the decision is made to reopen the *Daïra,* but without its official leader, and confer limited administrative powers to the General Secretary of the *Daïra,* Toufik Adnane. He is in charge of the Assembly's management of the

you, you and your sponsors, until victory. Our battle is neither tribal nor individualistic. It is a real class struggle that started in Barbacha. It is the will of the people against the will of bourgeois and mafia power that, instead of serving the people at the bottom of society, offer themselves as servants to global and imperialist capitalism."

The exceptional regime applied for so long in Kabylia and the regimes of repressive terror deployed during the Berber Springs and the 1990's both left permanent scars on the relationships in Algerians' movements regarding the use of violence. In Barbacha, the majority of the population—which participated in the burning down of a police station thirteen years earlier [in 2001]—seems to prefer occupations and blockades of buildings, roads, or towns as well as mass marches and general strikes. But in the debate between the residents (which we attended), the partisans of armed insurrection, although in a minority, are not stigmatized or cast aside; they are respected in their perspectives and are integrated into the struggle. It seems there is a predominant will to minimize employing acts of violence the more co-opted they can be by power and the more useful they could be to justify the remilitarization of the territory, while completely undertaking all forms of offensive direct action when the situation necessitates it. For example, a young anarchist in Barbacha who is very involved in the Assembly prefers what he calls "nonviolence," and says, "even in my interventions within the movement, I defend the idea of sometimes utilizing violence, such as, for example, burning the ballots next April 17 [the date of the presidential elections]. I see all the psychological scars of past movements, like the events of 2001. Just seeing a gendarme makes us want to burn everything down." In Barbacha, these debates seem to uplift the movement rather than dividing it.

old world itself—that asserted its assault on freedom through the police state and Islamic fundamentalism.

Habiba's father, an ethnic Kabyle, was married with two daughters during the Algerian War of Independence. He was a *harki,* something he did not like to talk about. It was a poignant subject in their household. Why would anyone choose to fight against his country and people? Wearing these two badges of shame, a *harki* and a Kabyle, was not easy.

The word *harki* has generally come to mean "traitor": in the Algerian context it refers to an Algerian soldier who fought on the French side of the war—sometimes not by choice. Habiba's father was told his family would be killed if he did not help the armed forces of France keep Algeria as their colony. In return for fighting at their side against the anti-colonial forces, he was promised asylum in France. He found a new life in France, where Habiba was born. Obviously, the transition wasn't easy for the family. They would have preferred that their country regain its independence from France, and it did, but they never were able to savor the victory. As a child, Habiba visited Algeria with her mother, but things were not the same as her mother had left it. As for Habiba, the experience was very disappointing. She had hoped for acceptance but instead encountered disdain from children in the village her mother grew up in. Being called a dirty Arab back in France was normal, almost expected, but to be called a dirty French in the land of her ancestors left her disheartened and confused.

It was a few years before she understood what it all meant. She was the daughter of a traitorous *harki,* a man who had betrayed his country and fled with hundreds of thousands of others. Or at least that was what those kids were told she was.

After that trip she had a better understanding of where she came from and she was never the same again. Everything she thought she was came crumbling down. It was only after decades that she discovered her true background: her parents had been Arabized; they were Kabyles assimilated into the Ara-

bic culture and language, and all her life she was made to believe she was part of a culture that deep down she knew she was never part of. Today she is proud to say that she is part of the Kabyle people, some of the most resilient and courageous people in North Africa. Today she hopes that the people of Kabylie will keep fighting for their rights, for their language and to regain their independence.

In translating this piece and presenting the existence of the movement in Barbacha to the English-speaking public, we strongly felt their struggle needed to be known to a wider audience. We did so not just simply to offer a mere news piece to enlighten the Anglosphere on the *zeitgeist* in northern Algeria, but to inspire others, to move people out of pessimism and fatalism, to show them resistance and change are not impossible. Furthermore, we do so for the people of Barbacha's request for support and solidarity outside of Algeria, as they have stated plainly that they wish to unite with everyone across the world who yearn for freedom from oppression. We present this project to serve as outreach in order that their struggle might connect with other struggles against authoritarianism, hierarchy, capitalism, and racism.

Barbacha City Hall, blocked by the residents to prevent the installation of the "shameful alliance," 2013.

Echoes of the Free Commune of Barbacha

"Échos de la commune libre de Barbacha," by Matouf Tarlacrea (with the gracious help of Amazigh, Morgane, Da Taïeb, Mabrouk, and Da Elhamid) in *Article 11,* 2014. Translated from the French by Michael Desnivic and Habiba Dhirem-Kasper.

Barbacha is a small region in Kabylia, made up of 34 villages with 27,000 inhabitants. Since 2012, the people there decided to forego holding the reins of municipal authority to instead develop diverse forms of self-management, notably via their Open Gen-

This collective handling of the organization of the commune leads to a form of revolutionary radicalism. In its "Open Letter to Everyone" dated January 22, 2013, the OGA announces:

> "We will spare no effort to build any bridges necessary to expand our movement to all the Algerian people for a genuine emancipatory social revolution to federate our multiple discontents, oh so legitimate, and all of our actions. In Sidi Buzid, it was a suicide. In Barbacha, it was a ray of hope that shined through."

January 26, 2013: the six legitimately elected members of the PST and the NRD (*Rassemblement national démocratique*[11]) resigned and gave their power of attorney to the Assembly to move toward the dissolution of the PCA and to provoke new elections. The Assembly also decided to demand the resignation of the entire prefecture. In its Communiqué No. 6 of January 29, 2013, it calls on the entire population of Barbacha and "every person convinced of the justness of our battle, wherever they may be" to stage a general strike on commune territory on January 31, with "the shutdown of all access from midnight to 4 pm." The communiqué ends, *"Long live the people, organized and conscious. Long live the people's solidarity. We are moving forward."*

But on January 30, the FLN building is burned down. Claiming their strategy to be "peaceful," the OGA condemns this action which it sees as provocation from the State to justify its repression. Communiqué No. 7 of January 30, 2013 proclaims:

> "We are telling all Hamhamists,[12] enemies of the people at the bottom of society, that these kinds of acts will only reinforce our determination to fight

[11] National Rally for Democracy, liberal party founded in 1997. —Trans.

[12] Opportunists that only act to fill their bellies.

> Scientific and cultural activity in organizing nightly festivities after the GA's tasks are completed;
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> Quarantining those elected by the shameful alliance, requiring that they resign within 24 hours, the denunciation of their sponsors and support as well as all participants in the various attempts at manipulation in the instrumentalization and intimidation of high school (and other) students and communal workers;
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> -The construction of a general strike and other large-scale actions."

Therefore, the General Assembly is not just an organization for struggle and resistance. It has become an everyday meeting place and takes charge of various aspects in the maintenance of the commune: trash collection, the distribution of fuel for schools, cleaning, etc. Mabrouk spoke also about how the employees of the People's Communal Assembly (PCA) hadn't been paid in four months: "These are people who have four, five, or six children. In order to take care of them these past four months, we organized together to find money and food, to respond to their needs… In addition, we help the sick who may be in need of passports to travel to France or Belgium for healthcare, and we take care of that for them. We also do the same for the maintenance of schools, supplying them with fuel and supplying their cafeterias." Some business owners and residents even contributed to finance certain projects. Mabrouk recounts: "This is how we've worked from then until today. We have assemblies all the time, we work in solidarity. We want a PCA of the people, not a PCA of power."

French. —Trans.

eral Assembly (OGA). Matouf Tarlacrea was there a few months ago accompanied by friends. He brings with him this collective story.

Echos de la Commune libre de Barbacha.

Barbacha—*Iberbacen* in Tamazight, the Berber language—is a region in Little Kabylia, Algeria, self-managed by its inhabitants since the end of 2012. "Barbacha is just a small hamlet left aside from all the treasures of Algeria," says Da Taïeb, an elder of the Commune. "It's a poor region located in a mountainous area. We have no trails or roads."

As in other regions, the peasants and workers of Barbacha fight day by day to live a dignified life confronted with all the forms of exploitation and oppression imposed by the State and capitalism. But in Barbacha, something else has also created itself. The 27,000 residents of these 34 villages comprising the population of Iberbacen, effectively self-organized through the Open General Assembly (OGA), established a collectively-occupied building. "In Barbacha, we have created this house to protest against the system that crushes us endlessly. The system that governs us right now is rotten," says Da Taïeb. He and a few others welcomed us in February 2014 with their story and showed us their archives.

Here are a few sketches of these roads drawn by the people of Barbacha—paths for all those who are fighting for emancipation all over the world.

A Tradition of Insubordination and Autonomy

The region of Barbacha has been a site of Berber resistance against all colonization as well as a place of continuous battles for Tamazight culture and language. This has been imbedded in the long history of the struggles of the Kabyle people for autonomy and independence. The region cultivates this with the

methods of practicing mutual aid and solidarity, insubordination and insurrection that are passed down from generation to generation. "It's a movement that was born in 1979. And this fight for culture, for language, for everything, continues. Because we are not [yet] independent!" says Da Elhamid, a welder in central Barbacha.

Like most parts of Kabylia, the region revolted in 2001. Among what was obtained were cultural rights, and those revolts allowed the inhabitants to eliminate numerous police stations and *gendarmeries*[2] which were opposed to all forms of struggle and any autonomous social life.

On top of the harassment, the racketeering and the systematic brutalities, the Algerian State for a long time applied a strategy of tension based on murder and civilian abductions as a form of permanent counter-insurrection. Faced with an exceptional regime, the people did not give in. In 2001, they expelled the police and military forces in the Barbacha region and burned down their buildings. Mabrouk, an English teacher in the commune, explained that the population was doing without security services for thirteen years: no gendarmerie, no police. During those thirteen years, no crimes or infractions were committed.

Mabrouk, an English teacher.

Amazigh, a youth from the region, has determined that the gendarmerie "is of no use. On the contrary, it oppresses. It's not there for our security. For twelve years, we organized ourselves in village committees. Each village assures its security by its own residents." It is in this collective self-defense experiment that new forms of communal self-organization have been created. Mabrouk further explains, "We organized ourselves. Each village has someone responsible. And the people of these

[2] Generally unknown in English-speaking countries, a "gendarmerie" is a French word (and French invention) for a military police force involved in the law enforcement of rural regions. In Algeria, they are substantially militarized and brutal, thus particularly despised. —Trans.

"To the peoples and populations of the world fighting for real sovereignty: may the year 2013 be a good and happy one of solidarity struggles and all that can be gained from them!"

To get to Béjaïa from Barbacha, it's about 40 kilometers (25 miles). Not exactly next door. The demonstration of January 5, 2013 nevertheless unites over a thousand people. The protestors block the main road leading to Béjaïa to demand the organization of new elections. This demonstration marks the effective involvement of the residents of other communes in other *Wilayahs.*A solidarity even more valuable emerges knowing that legal proceedings would be charged against militants accused of blocking city hall.

Communiqué No. 4 shows that in the space of autonomous struggles, there emerge new forms of collective organization:

> "In detailing its durations of battles, the General Assembly (GA) made the following propositions:
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> The reinforcement of its self-organization by the integration of more delegates and volunteers of all villages by their distribution into commissions according to the tasks it has accomplished and the demands to stop and take charge;[10]
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> An improved organization of volunteer actions concerning vigilance and security as well as trash collection, particularly around Suq n Tlata;
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> -Taking charge of repairs in different sectors: the supply of drinking water, sanitation, public lighting, etc.;
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[10] This peculiar phrasing at the end of the sentence is in the original

Little by little, the Open General Assembly of the residents of Barbacha has replaced the centralized and authoritarian management of city hall. At first limiting itself to the struggle against the State, it extends itself, little by little, to different domains of collective life. A path to the basics has anchored in a unique history.

The Autonomy of Struggle and the Struggle for Autonomy

It's in this battle against the installation of a fraudulent mayor by the State and the big political parties that the Commune of Barbacha creates self-organization. While the swindler mayor tries to settle in the PCA (the People's Communal Assembly, *Assemblée populaire communale,* or "city hall"), accompanied by an attorney general, a crowd assembles a first time to prevent access. Resolutely determined to solve the problem, the residents decide to block all access to city hall. Hundreds of them, including activists from the FFS and the RCD, in disagreement with the elected parties, mobilize day and night, occupying and blocking all municipal services (the registry office, etc.) and prohibit the slightest meeting of these elected puppets.

"The interests of the Commune, which is in a state of stagnation, come before all other interests, and our interest today is to place Barbacha back on track; this can only happen by the resignation of all elected officials," announces the second Communiqué of the OGA (December 30, 2012). Communiqué No. 3 points out the strategies of rottenness exercised by the State against the population to create divisions among those mobilized against them. This text calls for the dissolution of the PCA, the nomination of a temporary leader of the *Daïra* to manage administrative affairs, and a rally for January 5 at the headquarters of the *Wilayah* of Béjaïa. The assembly signed off,

villages organize together. If there is an enemy that wishes to enter, we create a security post at night and we organize with everyone to help in teams." He goes on to explain that after four years, people got in the habit of living without these security teams. "But as soon as there's a problem, everyone will come together and organize and fight." In Barbacha, there are not even State-run courts: justice is rendered on the traditional model of the *aarchs,* the councils of the wise.

The Shutdown of the *Daïra*[3] and Its Replacement by the Open General Assembly

The direct conflict with the Algerian State and its structures grew even more divisive during the preparation of the municipal elections of November 2012. During this time, the *Wali* (governor) Hemmou Hmed Et-Touhami actually refused to register the PST,[4] largely supported by the residents of Barbacha. They decided to fight so that the PST could be registered. And they won this cause. In the elections of November 29, the PST finally got 39% of the vote, with six out of fifteen elected. Clearly their list is the majority.

Except that the four other parties on the list formed an alliance to impose another mayor, Benmeddour Mahmoud, of the RCD. And this occurred despite the existence of a law declaring that a list that has obtained 35% of the vote can nominate the new mayor. The election was held even without the PST member list present, who had not even been notified of this. This *"shameful alliance,"* as Barbacha's residents called it, united the

[3] Subdivision of a Wilayah (prefecture), that is to say, a sub-prefecture. [A Wilayah (an Arabic word) might be better understood in English as "region," "province," "county," etc. A Daïra, unique to Algeria and the Western Sahara, can be best translated as "district." —Trans.]

[4] PST: Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs (Socialist Workers Party), an anticapitalist and internationalist party founded in 1989, a member of the Fourth International.

RCD,[5] the FLN,[6] and the FFS,[7] parties initially opposed to one another, in their struggle for state power.

The population of Barbacha rose up against this manipulation. They closed the *Daïra,* then city hall, and collectively requisitioned the local village hall in order to create the *Axxam n Caâb*[8]—the House of the People—where, since then, the Open General Assembly (OGA) of Barbacha's villages meet. A banner hangs there: *"Long live the struggle, for only struggle pays off."*

Within this assembly, only alcohol, drugs, and "lack of respect" are prohibited by collective decision. Da Taïeb explains how it operates: "As soon as there is a problem, we meet, we make decisions; our words matter. This is our strength, the law of the people. […] This house, we acquired it with our collective power. No one can shut it down, and here we speak of whatever we wish to speak of, we say whatever we want. Letting anyone step on our toes is out of the question." The welder Da Elhamid adds, "Everyone has the right to speak. And the people there are there as volunteers. That is democracy, true democracy, because it comes from the people. […] We organize ourselves for marches, for contributions, for everything, everything, everything. We must always fight."

Da Taïeb.

Mabrouk, the English teacher in his thirties, specifies that, "We fight against corruption, for the dignity of the people." Faced with the "power of the State" which describes them as "a mafia of young people who spend their nights in a house,"

[5] RCD: Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie (Rally for Culture and Democracy), social democratic party created in 1989 founded after the formation of the Mouvement culturel berbère.

[6] FLN: Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front), current party of the State under the ruling military junta.

[7] FFS: Front des Forces Socialistes (Socialist Forces Front), social democratic party founded in 1963.

[8] Axxam n Caâb: this is Tamazight, not Arabic. —Trans.

Mabrouk states that the people that come to the *Axxam n Caâb* are "the peasants, the intellectuals, the artists." "It is a place of one hundred percent freedom: there are no currents, neither religious nor political, inside this house; there are no ideas of the PST or any alliances with the FFS, only the ideas of the peasants and the inhabitants."

After each assembly, someone is in charge of writing a communiqué that is dispatched to prisons, to citizens, and posted on all the walls of the commune. It is even sent to the security services, "Because we don't do this behind closed doors!" says Mabrouk.

An excerpt of the very first bulletin of the OGA, broadcasted and posted in the villages of the commune states:

> *"We citizens, the men and women of the Commune of Barbacha, organized as an Open General Assembly, strongly reaffirm our rejection of Daho Ould Kablia's*[9] *instruction which opens the path to clientelism, and we consider the installation of the pseudo-mayor by decree of the Wali of Bgayet (Prefect of Béjaïa) dated December 17, 2012, to be annulled and invalidated. […] Furthermore, we hold the public powers and those elected in the so-called coalition responsible for the decay of this situation (blockading the Daïra and city hall, the treatment of communal workers, etc.). We reserve the right to create large-scale actions. […] LONG LIVE THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE! STAY IN SOLIDARITY! LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE!"*
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> -Communiqué No. 1 of the Open General Assembly of the Residents of Iberbacen, December 26, 2012.

[9] Daho Ould Kablia (born 1933), former Interior Minister of Algeria in charge of Algeria's gendarmerie, among other bureaucratic affairs. —Trans.